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Media Release

EDS welcomes new government and environmental reforms

The Environmental Defence Society (EDS) has welcomed the new Labour-led government.

“The policy commitments from Labour, NZ First and the Greens promise a remarkably progressive trajectory for the environment and conservation over the next 3 years,” says EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“There is a lot of overlap that we expect to see reflected in the coalition documents. The electorate is seeking faster and more decisive action on key areas of concern. These include freshwater, climate change and conservation management.

“Labour’s suggestion of a freshwater summit with all stakeholders needs some careful thought. There is little point in returning to the days of position stating that is all a big forum would deliver. Fixing freshwater demands a high degree of technical expertise and sophisticated policy development, building on where we have got to. Significant progress has been made with the National Policy Statement and we need to give its limits-based framework time to bite. There is still room for improvement, however.

“If the freshwater levy is off the table then solutions will need to be found in improving the regulatory and incentives frameworks, and finding an alternative funding pool to support freshwater clean-ups. Labour intimated that land use consents would be required for intensification of land use. That could be an effective measure but needs careful nuancing so that it’s only required where needed.

“There is broad agreement to establish a Climate Commission that would plan, recommend, monitor and report on the transition to net zero emissions by mid-century. The Commission should be statutory, report to Parliament and include adaptation within its remit. This commitment is very important and it would be constructive if the National Opposition could consider supporting the proposal. The Commission needs to be in place for decades and cross-party support now would ensure that.

“On economic development, it’s important that the coalition agreements reflect the fact that environment and conservation are integral parts of the economy, not separate. We don’t want a government that has the economic development Ministers in perpetual conflict with the environment and conservation ones. There are big challenges here that are not simple or one-dimensional.

“The economy needs fundamental transformation both for reasons of efficiency and to address climate change, points that are reflected in Labour’s election policies.

“Labour promised more funding for conservation and a continuing commitment to predator free New Zealand. We can expect NZ First to have demanded more research into alternatives to 1080, which remains the best tool in the meantime. DOC’s advocacy budget should be set for an increase and we can expect a fundamental relook at the future of High Country pastoral leases and tenure review.

“On resource management, we can expect to see some short-term reforms that will reverse a number of the changes to the Resource Management Act made earlier this year by National. One of those is to repeal the section 360 Ministerial override powers. Consistent with that commitment would be the refusal of the new plan provisions proposed by the Ministry of Primary Industries for expansion of aquaculture by King Salmon Ltd in protected parts of the Marlborough Sounds. That decision will be on the desk of the Minister for Primary Industries.

“EDS along with some key business groups has been arguing for a fundamental rethink of the resource management system. While Labour hasn’t quite gone that far, it seems open to at least considering whether such longer-term reform is desirable. The Greens do support such a review and NZ First seems open to it. That is welcome. We really need to design a resource management system fit for purpose for the next 30 years.

“As a leading environmental think-tank and litigator, EDS is keenly interested in the comprehensive reform agenda that now seems in play. We look forward to contributing to that process,” Mr Taylor concluded.

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